

UNITED STATES TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

September 7, 2022

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

On behalf of the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board, we thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations that will improve the nation's infrastructure to effectively support the travel and tourism industry.

In 2019, Amtrak carried 6 billion passenger miles¹, all forms of public transit carried 64 billion passenger miles, and commercial airlines carried 730 billion passenger miles. By contrast, U.S. highways and byways carried nearly 5.6 trillion passenger miles.²

From highways and byways to neighborhood roads, domestic and international travelers use our nation's public roadways daily. As the U.S. travel and tourism industry continues its recovery from the effects of the pandemic, we must consider the infrastructure investments needed to support and facilitate travel to destinations throughout the country and achieve the ambitious goals laid out in your recent *National Travel and Tourism Strategy*.

Throughout the U.S., 40% of public roadways are in poor or mediocre condition, costing motorists \$141 billion per year in the form of repairs, vehicle depreciation, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.³ Highway congestion caused travelers to avoid 47.5 million auto trips in 2018, reducing travel spend by nearly \$30 billion.⁴ Additionally, investing in highway safety improvements has the potential to save 63,700 lives and prevent 353,560 serious injuries over 20 years.⁵ We must support an infrastructure system that provides a safe and comfortable journey for our nation's visitors and workers.

We offer the following recommendations to improve the infrastructure that supports our nation's travel and tourism industry.

Recommendation #1: Support diverse, inclusive, and accessible travel by collaborating with Federal, state, and local officials to identify and fund major highway and byway projects that improve interconnection to travel and tourism-reliant communities.

The Federal government will distribute \$1.2 trillion in funding to new and existing programs over the next five years, including \$110 billion in new funding for roads and bridges, through the

¹ One passenger-mile is equal to one passenger carried one mile. For example, 10 passengers carried 10 miles would equal 100 passenger miles.

² "Transportation Statistics Annual Report," Bureau of Transportation Statistics, [U.S. Department of Transportation, December 2021](#)

³ "Key Facts About the U.S. Surface Transportation System," [TRIP, January 2022](#)

⁴ "Congestion is Pushing Our Cities Further Apart," [U.S. Travel Association, Accessed July 2022](#)

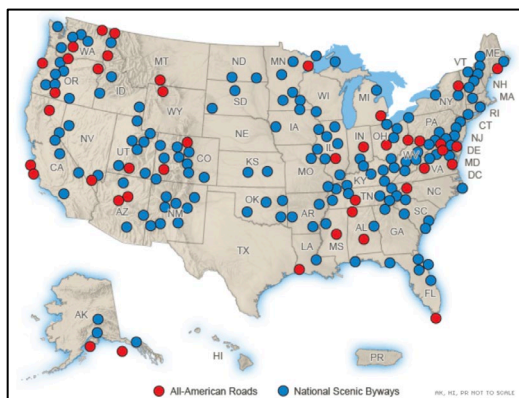
⁵ "[Safety Benefits of Highway Infrastructure Investments, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, May 2017](#)

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). As these funds are disbursed, it is essential that the Administration consider roadway improvements that are necessary to ease travel within the United States and support the billions of dollars in economic output and millions of jobs that depend on the travel industry.⁶

Throughout the country are priority projects that have a significant impact on the economy and the travel and tourism industry of its host community. Examples of select projects and their impact on host communities is attached in an Appendix.

As the Administration's leading voice on travel and tourism, we specifically recommend that the Commerce Department engage with White House Infrastructure Coordinator Mitch Landrieu and state and territory infrastructure coordinators to determine each jurisdiction's top travel and tourism-related roadway needs to create a better travel experience for visitors and workers alike. We also ask the Commerce Department to review the projects recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Travel and Tourism Infrastructure on their *2019 Report to the Department of Transportation*, identify priority projects that are important to the travel and tourism industry, and update this list on a regular basis.

Recommendation #2: Work with Congress to create a pilot program within the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) that complements funding provided by the National Scenic Byways Program (NSBP) for states and federally-recognized tribes seeking to revitalize and enhance byways with a focus on economic development opportunities and helping to achieve the National Travel and Tourism Strategy's goal of fostering a resilient and sustainable travel and tourism industry.



The National Scenic Byways Program (NSBP) was created in 1991 to help preserve our nation's roads recognized by its archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities. Today, the U.S. is home to 184 All-American Roads and National Scenic Byways⁷ in 48 states.⁸

⁶ ["U.S. Travel Answer Sheet." U.S. Travel Association, May 2022](#)

⁷ To receive an *All-American Road* designation, a road must possess multiple intrinsic qualities that are nationally significant and have one-of-a-kind features that do not exist elsewhere. To be designated as a *National Scenic Byway*, a road must possess at least one of the six intrinsic qualities and be regionally significant. These roads are often the 'roads less traveled.'

⁸ ["FHWA Announces First Availability of National Scenic Byways Program Funding Since 2012." Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, March 16, 2022](#)

Since its inception in 1965, the EDA has supported job creation and infrastructure development in distressed communities to encourage private investment, long-term recovery, and community resilience. The Federal Highway Administration announced \$22 million in grants earlier this year through the NSBP to fund improvements along our country's scenic roadways for the first time since 2012.⁸ We recommend adopting a pilot program that further supports the NSBP to create more resilient and sustainable travel routes and destinations for decades to come.

Recommendation #3: Foster a continued whole-of-government approach to travel and tourism to identify and support travel and tourism-related priorities to support the National Travel and Tourism Strategy's five-year goal of attracting 90 million visitors, who will spend \$279 billion annually, including:

- Encourage the White House to create and for Congress to properly fund the position of *Travel and Tourism Coordinator* to demonstrate the importance of the travel and tourism to our economy and provide much-needed coordination throughout the whole-of-government.
- Support travel and tourism-focused programs and initiatives within other agencies, including the National Advisory Committee on Travel and Tourism Infrastructure at the Department of Transportation.
- Collaborate with the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State, and the Department of Transportation to provide a seamless travel experience, including broadband access in underserved communities, biometric identification, digital visa appointments, and improvements to our roadways and public transportation systems.

Whether traveling for pleasure, business, or work, our nation's roadways serve as the backbone of our economy. We recommend the Department of Commerce to continue its leadership in the travel and tourism space by supporting and fostering a holistic approach to tackling the problems facing the travel and tourism industry.

Thank you for your continued leadership and support of the travel and tourism industry. We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations and look forward to our continued partnership in supporting successful and thriving travel and tourism industry.

Respectfully submitted,



Bill Hornbuckle
Chair

Brad Dean
Vice Chair

APPENDIX

Select Highway Projects

Interstate-15 Corridor (California, Nevada)

The I-15 Corridor between southern California and Las Vegas serves as a primary access route for more than 42 million people and \$108 billion of freight annually.⁹ It is a vital commercial and tourism route that serves the western part of the country with direct impact to the economic success of the region. The route is often congested, causing several hours of delays and billions in travel spending. Improvements to the corridor will increase accessibility on the oft-traveled route.

Calcasieu River Bridge (Louisiana)

The Calcasieu River Bridge in Louisiana serves over 90,000 daily crossings¹⁰ and is vital to the livelihood of residents of the region, but the bridge is beyond its expected life and needs to be replaced.

Interstate-73 (Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia)

The I-73 Corridor, first planned in 1991, is Congressionally designated as a High Priority Corridor on the National Highway System. The completion of the project will provide a direct route to a multitude of tourist destinations around the country, including Detroit, Charleston, Columbus, Myrtle Beach, and the Great Lakes. From a public safety standpoint, an evacuation of the Myrtle Beach area during peak travel season is currently estimated to take 50 hours. Completion of I-73 will reduce that time drastically.

Overlook Clearing for the Blue Ridge Parkway (North Carolina)

The Blue Ridge Parkway is one of the most visited assets in the National Park system with an estimated 15.9 million recreation visits to the park in 2021.¹¹ Encompassing 469 miles from Virginia to North Carolina, budget cuts have affected visitor satisfaction at the park. Clearing overlook vistas along the parkway will allow visitors to maximize the natural and cultural resources of the U.S.

US-97 Bend North Corridor (Oregon)

The U.S. Bend North Corridor serves as a major east-west highway in the region, connecting eastern and central Oregon. The corridor serves as a route for the more than 4.3 million overnight visitors welcomed to central Oregon each year and carries an average of \$47.5 million in freight per day. The project will improve a 6-mile segment of the corridor, aiding with congestion and improving safety for all drivers.

⁹ [“NACTTI Report to DOT,” National Advisory Committee on Travel and Tourism Infrastructure, U.S. Department of Transportation, January 2021](#)

¹⁰ [Build Our Bridge Across the Calcasieu. Accessed July 2022](#)

¹¹ [“Parkway visitation tops 15 million in 2021,” National Park Service, February 2022](#)